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U.S. Marine Corps' CH-53K helicopter completes first external load test

A CH-53K King Stallion conducts its first hover with a 12,000 lb. load Apr. 19, 2016 at Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation's Development Flight Center in West Palm Beach, Fla. (Photo courtesy Sikorsky)

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. – A CH-53K King Stallion, the U.S. Marine Corps' newest helicopter, completed its first external load flight test Apr. 19 at Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation's Development Flight Center, suspending, then releasing, a 12,000 lb. load.

Further tests will continue to expand the envelope with external payloads of 12,000 pounds flown first in hover, then incrementally increasing speeds up to 120 knots, followed by 20,000 and 27,000 pound external payloads.

"It is exciting to have achieved our first external lift, another important step towards fielding the most powerful U.S. military helicopter," said U.S. Marine Corps Colonel Hank Vanderborght, H-53 Heavy Lift Helicopters (PMA-261) program manager for the Naval Air Systems Command. "Our program continues on pace to deploy this incredible heavy lift capability to the Marine Corps."

The CH-53K King Stallion is equipped with single, dual, and triple external cargo hook capability that will allow for the transfer of three independent external loads to three separate landing zones in support of distributed operations in one single sortie without having to return to a ship or other logistical hub. The three external cargo hooks include a

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single center point hook with a 36,000 lb. capability and dual-point hooks, each capable of carrying up to 25,200 lbs. The system features an electrical load release capability from the cockpit and cabin, and a mechanical load release capability at each of the pendant locations. An auto-jettison system is incorporated to protect the aircraft in the event of a load attachment point failure.